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Farming, identity and well-being: managing changing gender roles within Western European farm families

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Abstract

This article is concerned with how men and women on farms socially construct their gender and work identities through interaction with each other and public representations of themselves. It is argued that identity is a process, and like gender, it is socially constructed through doing identity. Farming has changed tremendously over the last forty years in Europe. The position of women in the labour market and on the family farm has also undergone significant changes. In Western Europe, women in general and women on family farms are more likely to be active in the labour market than they were forty years ago. While it remains the case that all of their labour on the farm is not properly recorded, they now also have visible, paid employment. Scholars have been surprised that farm women's gender identity has not changed more significantly with this changed labour market presence. This article argues that in order to understand this limited change we need to understand how men and women in family farms verify and reinforce farming work identities and farming gender identities. It is argued that while off-farm work does not "look" like gender deviant work, it is because it questions the male breadwinner role. An analysis of this helps us understand why the discourse of the family farm remains so dominant and so persistent. In 2012 and 2013, a qualitative study was undertaken in Northern Ireland to examine the gender implications of the EU rural development programme on farms and rural areas. Some of the data gathered as part of this study is interpreted to shed light on how and why particular work and gender identities are constructed within the farm family.

KEYWORDS: farming, gender identity, work identity, well-being, change.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that Western European agriculture has gone through a tremendous change. The agricultural workforce is a declining part of the overall workforce. Many farms now need additional sources of income to survive, and farming is increasingly becoming a part-time activity. Agriculture has had to realign itself to meet the economic, political and environmental concerns of the European Union and global society more

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generally (Dessein & Nevens 2007). In tandem with these structural changes, the social and cultural understanding of farming and being a farmer has changed. Farming and farmers no longer command the social status that they once did (Villa 1999). Whereas it was the privileged son who was seen to inherit the farm, more recently the heir is seen as receiving ‘the poisoned chalice’ (Kelly & Shortall 2002).

In addition to these changes in the nature of agriculture, the position of women in society generally and in agriculture has been transformed over the last forty years. The lifting of the marriage ban, the greater availability of divorce and contraception has dramatically changed the lives of women. Gender segregation is still a pervasive feature of all labour markets, and there are differences in men and women’s employment by sector, workplace and occupation. Nonetheless, across most of Western Europe women have become more permanently attached to the labour market, and the presumption that women are carers first and workers second is no longer held to be true (Rubery & Rafferty 2013).

The position of women in farming families has also changed enormously. Early research was concerned with the hidden, undervalued and “private” nature of women’s farm work (Shortall 1992, 1999; Brandth 2002; Bock 1994). Women’s occupational identity and status was seen as weak and hardly recognised. Men occupied the public space of farming. Men were the head of the farm and occupied the public spheres of farming (Alston 2000; Shortall 1999; Brandth 2002). Women were seen to occupy the private sphere of the farm household and their work on the farm was not recorded in agricultural statistics. Many qualitative studies have shown that agricultural statistics to under-report women’s farm labour (Shortall 2010; Bock & Shortall 2006; Brandth & Haugen 2010). Official statistics tend to count male farm labour, and are less able to capture women providing relief farm labour for a full day if their spouse is away, or their managerial input, or feeding of farm labourers. In 2010, women were estimated to provide 41% of the farm labour on European farms, although this figure hides enormous variation across Europe (see Shortall 2010). Changed cultural and legal frameworks now enable women to choose to be active in the labour market. Women’s off-farm work, and entrepreneurial activities on the farm mean that gender roles and identities have changed (Kelly & Shortall 2002; Bock 2004; Brandth & Haugen 2010). Brandth and Haugen (2010) argue that outdoor and indoor work still play a defining role in agriculture, with outdoor work coded as masculine, and indoor work coded as feminine (also see Pini 2004). In this article, I am interested in exploring what women’s off-farm work means for gender identities in farm families. Men and women on European farms, particularly smaller farms, undertake off-farm labour to ensure the survival of the family farm (EuroChoices 2014). While the official statistics on this trend are not comprehensive, qualitative country case studies show this to be the trend (Shortall 2010; Copus et al. 2006). Women’s off-farm work is very much in the public sphere, and in many instances they are now the primary breadwinner. While this is not overtly gender deviant work, such as driving tractors, it does compromise the male breadwinner identity. Quite a bit of research has focused on changed gender identities, and Brandth (2002) specifically called for more research on this question. However, the majority of research has either focused on changed gender identities of women or changed gender identities of men.

Kelly and Shortall (2002) argued that the farm household is the key unit of analysis, and people do not behave as maximising individuals within the household. Therefore, gender ideology arguments and resource bargaining arguments break down, because the household behaves as a collective. However, Kelly and Shortall do not consider how gender identities and work identities are worked out, changed and reinforced through social interaction within the household. This is the purpose of this article.

The next section reviews literature relevant to the arguments advanced. First, some of the literature on identity formation, and particularly identity control theory is reviewed. The importance of spouses and families in approving and reinforcing identities is examined, along with the importance of our sense of identity for our well-being and sense of self. Next, how changing gender and work identities are managed is considered. Then, I turn to look at gender identity and work identity on the family farm. This literature provides the framework to analyse qualitative data gathered in 2012–2013 in Northern Ireland. It is concluded that examining the ways in which gender and work identities are negotiated between farming couples helps us understand why the discourse of the family farm is so dominant, and why ‘neither men nor women seem able to escape easily from the positions offered them in this discourse’ (Brandth 2002: 196).

Relevant literature: Identity

The literature on identity is vast and spans a number of different disciplines. Brandth (2002) states it most clearly by saying that the concept of identity deals with who we are and who others are. It is knowing who we are, who others are, and us knowing how the other person understands their identity (Jenkins 2008). Burke (2007) takes it further and argues that identity is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or as a member of a social group that define who one is. Here I am interested in the sociological or social construction of identity. Identity has been at the heart of most sociology; it is the basis of Goffman’s (1959) ideas about presentation of self and symbolic interactionism, and Becker’s (1963) work on labelling theory shaping behaviour. Identity is constructed through social interaction. Like gender, identity formation is a process of doing. Identity is a continuous process rather than a trait of an individual and it is verified or questioned through social relations and social interaction (Jenkins 2008; Burke 1991; Burke & Harrod 2005; Stets & Burke 2005). Burke (1991, 2007) developed what he calls Identity Control Theory. Essentially this focuses on how a person’s identity is established and confirmed, and the relationship between the behaviour of the person based on their identity within the social structure in which that identity is embedded. Stets and Burke (2005) argue that we have multiple identities. These many identities need verification. Usually there is a hierarchy to our identities, with some being more important than others. Sometimes different identities compete, and verifying both can be problematic. They give the example of a young teenager who is simultaneously with her friend and her parents; with her friend she wants to appear cool and rebellious, and with her parents she wants to appear well-behaved and obedient. There are different types of identities and these can be tied to roles (for example, occupation), to groups and categories (nationality, gender) and to our personal attributes (kind, honest).

When the signs and symbols in any situation reinforce identity, identity is then confirmed and positive emotions result. However, when our identity is threatened, it leads to negative feelings and distress (Jenkins 2008; Burke 1991; Burke & Harrod 2005; Stets & Burke 2005). Identity loss threatens the continuity of our sense of self. Burke (1991: 841) describes it as ‘the broken loop.’ This occurs when our sense of self is not verified by those with whom we socially interact. The impact of non-identity verification depends on who it is. Greater distress is caused when the source of the feedback is a significant other. Spouses are highly significant sources of identity verification. Young married couples are more likely to enhance or boost each other’s identities, while couples married longer verify and reinforce identities (Burke & Harrod 2005). Families are crucial sources of identity verification. They have an archival function, and retain symbols of events and performances relevant to each member’s identity (Weigert & Hastings 1997). In addition to significant others causing the most distress when they do not verify identity, greater distress is caused when the interrupted identity is one that is very important to the person and is one to which the person is highly committed (Burke 1991). Also of interest is Stets and Burke’s (2005) argument that the negative effect of identity loss is more pronounced if it means a loss of power and status. However, focusing on the emotional impact of the loss of status and power takes attention away from the key variable causing the negative effect, which is the related loss of a sense of identity.

Gender, work and identity

In order to function, we need “common” knowledge so that we can engage in social relations and social interactions. We need to roughly know what to expect. Ridgeway (2009) argues that there are some primary frames that transmit information about individuals, and gender is one of these. Hence the title of her article; ‘Framed before we know it: how gender shapes social relations.’ She argues that gender as a primary frame is a belief system that privileges men over women, and means that men have an interest in enacting and maintaining that system. Gender as a primary frame interacts and shapes social relations in institutional frames, such as the family and workplace. Ridgeway (2009) considers how change occurs and notes that it can be a slow and gradual process. People tend to reinterpret the meaning of change through the lens of their existing more conservative gender beliefs.

Schneider (2012) argues that when men and women deviate from normative expectations about gender in one area of social life, they may seek to neutralise or compensate for this deviance in another sphere of social interaction. While he does not specifically discuss identity, his basic argument is that gender identity can be done and undone in different identity spheres. He examines men who do “women’s” work, and women who do “men’s” work. He also examines women who are the primary breadwinner in the couple, arguing that the construct of the male breadwinner has proved to be exceptionally durable, and masculinity is produced in part through fulfilling that expectation (p.1033). He further argues that threats to masculinity are more “severe” in terms of their impact on men than threats to femininity are for women. Engagement in gender-atypical occupations is a less serious threat to women’s gender identity than men’s.

Identity and the family farm

A considerable amount of work has focused on how the farm shapes the farm family, gender roles, and the identity of family members. All of these are bound up together; it is only possible to touch on some of that literature here, and it is done so for illustrative purposes. The farmer is typically understood to be male. It defines his role identity, his group identity, and his gender identity. The patrilineal line of inheritance also means that it is deeply embedded in culture and traditional practices that agriculture is male. Shortall (1992, 1999) describes it as ‘the third face of power’; gender and power relations are so shaped by the structure of agriculture that those involved do not see them anymore. Others have used Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* to describe the same powerful way in which the institution of farming is understood as masculine and embodying male work (Shucksmith 1993). Agency is a temporally embedded process, which draws on the past and the projected future to impact on action in the present (Leonard forthcoming). Farming is a long-established institution, accompanied by a strong commitment to keeping the farm in the male line. Here, Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is useful. *Habitus* invokes a process of socialisation whereby the dominant mode of thought and experience to which they are exposed are internalised by individuals, and these are continuously reinforced by their experiences and social interactions (Shucksmith 1993). The farmer’s *habitus* derives from his subconscious and the cumulative assimilation of an established ethos of being a farmer. In turn, *habitus* disposes actors to do certain things and behave in certain ways. Farmers know instinctively, without knowing, the right thing to do. Not only is the farmer’s behaviour guided by *habitus*, it is also constrained by it. This is, of course, also true for women on farms. *Habitus* is cumulatively constituted, so will only change gradually during the farmer’s life.

Similar to Schneider (2012), research has considered how women and men negotiate gender identities on the farm when non-traditional gendered farm work is undertaken (Brandth and Haugen 2005, 2010; Brandth 1994, 2002; Pini 2004, 2005; Bock 2004). This research has a broad interest in the consequences of structural changes in the agricultural industry for men and women’s identities. Brandth (1994) and Pini (2005) have considered how women attempt to maintain their feminine identity when they operate heavy farm machinery. Brandth and Haugen (2010) have shown both continuity and change in work and gender identities when farms develop tourism activities. More recent research has considered how changing gender roles and particularly women’s off-farm work is changing gender and work identities on the farm. Some of this research has focused on the threat to men’s well-being when their identity is threatened (Ni Laoire 2002; Kelly & Shortall, 2002; Shortall 2006; Price & Evans 2009). Others have argued that with the increase in off-farm work, one would expect new gender identities to emerge for women (Brandth 2002). However, identities are formed through doing, through social relations; they are not a static trait and will be verified or changed depending on social interaction with significant others. Kelly and Shortall (2002) and Shortall (2006) do acknowledge this through their discussion of how feelings of care and attachment influence how women treat men and protect their farming identity within the farm household. However, the

question of how gender identities and work identities are constructed and verified within the farm family needs further exploration and in particular the interrelation of changed gender identity and work identity on and off the farm and how identities are constructed in tandem should be examined. It is to this question that we now turn.

Farming in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, there are approximately 24,500 farms, the majority of which are small family-run farms (The Agricultural Census in Northern Ireland 2013). This number has declined by 6,100 since 1999, which reflects a common trend in Western Europe. The majority of farms are small or very small, and the average size is between 20 and 29.9 hectares.¹ The main agricultural activities are dairy, and cattle and sheep.

Most farms in Northern Ireland are increasingly dependent on subsidies and off-farm sources of income. In 2013, 44% of farmers were part-time farmers. Research of nearly fifteen years ago noted that even in the 1990s when farming incomes were historically high in Northern Ireland, modest levels of family consumption were unavailable to all but the largest farms without running down the farms' capital base (Moss et al 2000). In this context, family farming has continued in the face of adverse economic conditions, because it does not operate merely as a "business" in the traditional sense of the word. The presence of off-farm income from employment or economic transfers was an essential element in the continuance of many otherwise uneconomic small farm holdings. It is frequently women who are the first to seek off-farm employment. While the Department of Agriculture and Northern Ireland recognises that the information on off-farm income is not comprehensive,² some information is provided in the Farm Incomes Northern Ireland reports. In the 2012/2013 report, it noted that the average farm business income was £19,336 and that 54% of businesses had an additional off-farm income. The spouse of the farmer had off-farm employment on 23% of farms, and on a further 5% of farms the farmer had off-farm employment. This is not broken down by age, so it is not possible to examine changes for younger age groups, nor is it possible to determine educational levels.

Methodology

This research³ was undertaken to update Shortall and Kelly's (2001) study and followed the same qualitative methodology. The author carried out research in 2001 (Shortall & Kelly 2001; Kelly & Shortall 2002; Shortall 2006) which investigated the gender implications of the Common Agricultural Policy on men and women living in rural areas, and men and women living on farms. Despite being over a decade old, it was still used by DARD and the women's sector when considering the position of women in rural areas

¹ Very small and small means farms is less than two Standard labour Units, with 1 standard labour unit = 1900 hours.

² Personal communication, 8 October 8, 2014.

³ This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, grant reference: ES/JO1031/1. The field work was conducted by Roisin Kelly and Sally Shortall

(NIRWN 2009; WRDA 2005). In 2012, a successful application⁴ was made to update this research on how to ensure gender equal impact of the RDP. This is important because it is the key source of development money for rural areas across Europe. There is concern at a regional and EU level that the RDP is not having a sufficient impact on women. While the focus was on Northern Ireland, the findings are relevant to other regions in the EU. This research also investigated whether there are tensions between the EU's commitment to address structural gender inequalities through gender mainstreaming on the one hand, and its economic priorities on the other (Shortall 2014; Shortall & Bock 2014).

The specific funding obtained was to update previous research; it did not allow new research to be undertaken. Consequently, the format of the previous study had to be followed. The same methodology was used as in the original study, although more interviews were conducted this time round, partly because the nature of the Rural Development Programme is different and broader. We conducted thirty six individual interviews and with consent, taped and transcribed interviews. Twenty five out of the thirty six interviews were taped and transcribed. We also conducted seven focus groups with rural development men and women and farm men and women. Five of the focus groups are used in this article; those with men and women on farms, and one with rural female entrepreneurs. Two focus groups with women on farms were carried out. One of these was organised by a farmers' union and were women the union knew either through interacting with their husbands or directly with the women (Women Focus Group 1). The other focus group was with a "Farm Ladies Group" which has been in existence since 1990 (Women Focus Group 2). We conducted two focus groups with men on farms, both organised by the farmers' union (Men Focus Group 1 and Men Focus Group 2); 88% of the women in the focus groups (the spouses of the men in focus groups) worked off the farm. We were invited to participate in an event showcasing female entrepreneurs who had accessed funds from the RDP to start their own businesses. This event generated important data, both in terms of the presentations by successful entrepreneurs, and by us being able to use the event to have table discussions around a number of questions. All the women presenters were married to farmers. Focus groups had between eight and fourteen participants. The focus groups allowed us to update normative knowledge about the needs of rural areas, the needs of family farms, how these are addressed by the RDP, to what extent they are aware of and engage with the RDP and what might make them more likely to engage with the RDP, and gender differences. Taping the focus groups proved difficult, so both researchers took detailed notes and cross-checked these after the focus group meeting. Only quotes that both recorded are used.

Here, questions relating to farm identities are examined and it is only data from the farming focus groups and the rural women's entrepreneur event that are investigated. There were no specific questions asked about farming identity in the focus groups. Men and women were asked the same questions. Men and women were not mixed in the

⁴ Shortall wrote the application. Roisin Kelly was the research assistant on the original study, and she now works in the Northern Ireland Assembly, the devolved government for the region. Shortall wrote Kelly into the application and she was given a secondment to the university by the NI Assembly to work on the project.

original study, so this could not be done in the repeat study, although observing gender interactions would have been useful. Questions were asked about their involvement with farming unions; about their farm; whether it was full-time; if they felt their farm work was accurately recorded; how the CAP impacts their farm; who will inherit the farm; whether it matters if it is a boy or a girl; whether it matters if men and women have different roles in farming; whether barriers exist to increasing women's participation in agriculture; expectations for the farm in ten years; views on pre-nuptial agreements to prevent the break-up of farm units. Questions were not asked about the farm household, child care or domestic labour. It is not surprising then that the data relates primarily to farming identities and off-farm work. Our findings focus on the narrative used by men and women in the focus group about their own and their spouses farming identities.

Findings

Significant others and verifying identity

The literature on identity clearly identifies the importance of significant others in reinforcing our identity and sense of our self. Shortall (forthcoming) details the extent to which the number of significant others around farmers has changed over the last thirty years in the North and South of Ireland. Throughout the interviews, people talked about the increasing lone workers, the frequent part-time lone worker nature of farming, and the accompanying loneliness that goes with this status. However, part of this is also that there is a reduced presence of significant others to reinforce the man's identity as farmer. Men in particular mentioned this change:

Farming is a very lonely life now. It would be great if women were able to be more involved, but it isn't possible any more. It is a lonely life (Men Focus Group 1).

Now everyone of working age is gone. Everyone is working out. Before whoever was going to take it on (inherit the farm) would have been working with you (Men Focus Group 2).

It is lonely being on the farm. You have to deal with cattle dying on your own. It is not just women being out all day, it is also that there is no-one ... previously the parents were at home too, your mother and father. But that's gone now too (Men Focus Group 1).

For this generation of men, their position in farming has gone through a considerable transition. They do not live in the same house as their farming father, and their heir does not work full-time on the farm with them. Indeed, when they spoke about heirs, they were pleased that he had other work, and that his fiancé/ spouse or girlfriend also did, as they see the future of the farm as part-time. In combination with women's off-farm work, there is a decrease in the daily interaction with significant others who can verify their identity as farmers.

Farming identity and status

The literature on identity argues that the adverse effect of identity loss is more severe if it means a loss of power and status. The emotional impact of loss of power and status is said to be reliant on the related loss of a sense of identity (Stets & Burke 2005). The status attached to farming has changed over time. The patrilineal line of inheritance discriminates against women. Inheriting a finite valuable commodity is a privilege, but it also bears a cost. The heir has the responsibility to continue the family farm and pass on the business to his son. While the heir was once the privileged son, now it is less so the case (Kelly & Shortall 2002; Shortall 2006). Men talked with some resentment about their changed status as farmers:

The status of farmers has changed – there are so many stereotypes now. It makes us look like we are special needs; not very smart and not able to make a go of it (Men Focus Group 1).

You used to be somebody if you were a farmer (Men Focus Group 2).

If you counted all the work we do properly, we are doing at least eighty hours work a week. And you can barely make a living. We should get more respect (Men Focus Group 2).

How the single farm payment is put out in the media gives off the wrong impression. It looks like farmers are getting hand-outs, like we are scroungers. Nobody takes any notice of all the work we do. It is consumers who are being subsidised, not us (Men Focus Group 1).

Why say you will publish what farmers receive through the Single Farm Payment? Why should it be published? Why not publish other people's salaries? It is just another way of treating farmers like second class citizens (Men Focus Group 1).

Dessein and Nevens (2007) argue that the loss of autonomy over the farming business affects the farming sense of pride. I would argue that it also threatens the farmer's sense of identity as a self-employed agricultural producer:

Farming has changed so much over the years. It is a much bigger battle now. There is more stress involved in it all (Men Focus Group 1).

The multi-nationals are calling the shots; they dictate to farmers, we are not in charge any more (Men Focus Group 1).

The CAP⁵ has been so important financially, but we have lost a certain control over supply and demand, it has changed what it means to be a farmer (Men Focus Group 2).

Men's farming identity is threatened by the loss of status, power and autonomy.

⁵ The Common Agricultural Policy

The importance of the farming identity for men and women

Men

Quite a considerable amount of research has considered how farming is tied up with men's gender and role identity. This was evident throughout our interviews:

We are not making any money. It is very stressful. But it is not easy to get out of farming. It is our way of life. And farmers cling on to optimism. You always believe things will get better (Men Focus Group 2).

It is very difficult to do it seven days a week with no support. But the economics of it are such that you have no option but to do it on your own. There is no alternative – it is what we do – we are farmers (Men Focus Group 1).

The Irish people have a very particular relationship with the land. We had to fight for it, so you can't give it up (Men Focus Group 1).

Women

Our research also found a strong farming identity amongst the farm women interviewed. However, unlike the men interviewed, women's farming identity was not stressed or compromised. It was presented in a more straightforward fashion:

We meet up once a month and have a chat and a cup of tea. You hear what is happening. And we all have the one thing in common [farming] and we can talk about that, and we can unburden (Women Focus Group 2).

This established group organised both social and farming activities for themselves. They organise farm visits, speakers on various aspects of farming, tax inspectors, improving farm security, crime and preventing theft of farm machinery. They also organise social events, often including an overnight stay.

I do all the paperwork, and I can drive a tractor. My husband is an engineer. He did work out for a long time, but he just always felt he should be on the farm. I work part-time off the farm. But I love the farm, I love being outdoors (Women Focus Group 1).

I would know quite a lot about farming. I really enjoy living on a farm (Women Focus Group 1).

Farming is a really good way of life. It keeps you healthy. The farming community is a good one. You wouldn't be in it for the money but for the love of it (Women Focus Group 2).

Women's farming identity seems less compromised than men's. In general, women were not the breadwinning farmer, so changes in the occupation represent less of a changed farming identity for them. They focus on the positive life style associated with farming. However, as I now turn to examine, they did talk about changes in farming and what it means for men and their role in mitigating changes.

Off-farm work and gendered roles on the farm

Women increasingly work off-farm. This is linked both to the changed nature of farming and women's changed relationship with the labour market. Men in the focus groups spoke in a matter-of-fact way about women's off-farm work. They did see it as contributing to their isolation on the farm, but they also acknowledged the farm would be in trouble if they did not generate off-farm income:

My wife works out. If she didn't I might (Men Focus Group 1).

My wife works out. It is crucial. If she didn't, I don't know where we would be (Men Focus Group 2).

Farming is a very lonely life now. It would be great if women were able to be more involved, but it isn't possible any more. It is a lonely life (Men Focus Group 1).

While women's off-farm income in many instances now maintains the farm (Kelly and Shortall 2002; Shortall 2006), women working off the farm did not discuss their off farm work in any detail, even though many had professional jobs. They did describe their role on the farm as that of "helper", and reinforced their husband's identity as a farmer and as being in charge:

I would be involved in decisions, but I would defer to him, at the end of the day he is the farmer and he has to see it as his decision (Women Focus Group 1).

There is a massive increase in the amount of paperwork that has to be done. It is not what farmers see as farming – farming is producing food. Lots of farmers can't decipher what's important and what's irrelevant. Women have to help – you can't expect farmers to do that – it is not what they are built for (Women Focus Group 1).

There was a similar pattern with the well-established farm women's group. During the focus group, there was a conversation about the work that they do on the farm, i.e. farm tasks, administration and management, feeding calves, doing book-keeping and accounts, managing the herd register, cooking food for contractors. Following this there was a discussion about how farmers are not properly recognised and are not paid properly. 'Who do people think minds the countryside?' 'Where do people think their food comes from?' 'Farmers get so much bad press now.' When we asked if it mattered who owns the land, one woman commented 'It really matters to the men.' Then they discussed how important farming is to their husbands and how it 'is their way of life.' Women are reinforcing farming as a central part of men's identity.

Identity and "gender deviant" work

At the event to showcase successful women in the Rural Development Programme (RDP), three women made presentations about their very successful businesses for which they had received grant support from the RDP. All three women were married to farmers. All

presenters stressed their marital status and dependent children at an early stage in their presentations and in the biographical note provided in the conference packs. For example, one woman who had started an organic soap business, referred to having started her business in order to be able to combine income generation with caring for her daughter who has learning disabilities. She also stated that the family needed a higher income. Another woman had started a business in timber products. This woman frequently made reference to her husband's hard work in the business and technical knowledge and skills as a carpenter while repeatedly stressing that such knowledge was 'over her head.' This was despite her having a master's degree and many years of work experience. The third woman, who is a successful events manager, stated she had always wanted to start her own business. She described her husband on several occasions as 'a wonderful man' and 'brought her chopped fruit and a cup of tea in bed every morning' while suggesting he was not interested in her business. These latter two women also included photographs of their children in their presentations.

This seems to be a classic case of Schneider's (2012) argument that when men and women deviate from normative expectations about gender in one area of social life, they may seek to neutralise or compensate for this deviance in another sphere of social interaction. Here women play down their successful business entrepreneurship and their work identity. They accentuate their feminine identity, and discuss their children and their husbands. They are doing identity, both gender identity and work identity. In the process, they are constructing particular identities for their husbands as men, as smart, and as more knowledgeable about business matters than they are.

Conclusions

This article examines what women's off-farm work means for on-farm gender identities and work identities. While the position of women in the labour market and within the family farm has changed dramatically over the past forty years, scholars have questioned why new gender identities emerge so slowly for women. The discourse of the family farm remains highly dominant.

This article considers why this is the case and uses prior research on identity formation to do so. Identity means knowing who we are. It is crucial to our sense of self and our well being. Identity is constructed through social interaction, and it is a continuous process. Our identity is verified or questioned through our social relations and the people with whom we interact. When our identity is confirmed, positive emotions result, but when it is threatened, it leads to distress. Spouses are significant others in terms of identity verification for each other.

In this research, women are reinforcing men's work identity as a farmer, the decision-maker, the person in charge. Farming is fundamentally tied to gender, and through reinforcing his work identity, women also reinforce his masculinity. Men discussed their loneliness, and the absence of family that would previously have been on the farm; their parents, their wife, and their heir. There are now fewer people to positively reinforce their farming identity. When men discussed their status as farmers, they expressed resentment that they no longer have the same positive and respected standing in society that they

once had. They attempted to provide evidence of how such views are incorrect. This reveals the distress caused when peoples' sense of identity is not confirmed by those around them. Women also had a strong farming identity but did not express any distress about their identity. Instead, they talked about enjoying their lifestyle and living on the farm. They did, however, attempt to reinforce their husbands' position as breadwinners even when their off-farm work was the primary source of income.

Women and men on farms are "doing" gender, and "doing" identity, both gender identity and work identity. It is a process, and it happens through social interaction. At the rural women enterprise showcase event, it was particularly clear how women were doing gender and work identity. We have been surprised at the slowness at which alternative gender identities occur for women on farms as their lives have changed so dramatically. This is because of the process of doing gender and work identities. We care about our partners and families, and we do not want to adversely cause somebody distress by questioning their identity. Ridgeway (2009) argues that change is slow, because cultural beliefs and prior experience will shape gender beliefs in new structures. However, as material arrangements between men and women change, so too will cultural beliefs about gender: 'a single wave does not move a sandbar, but wave after wave does' (ibid.:157). I want to further argue that identity change is part of this equation. Perhaps the process of change involves helping others to change their identity and to do so gradually, and in a way that does not threaten the sense of self. I contend this is the reason that the discourse of the family farm is so dominant. Change has occurred, but women and men do gender identity and work identity in a way that allows the family farm discourse to persist, and now, it seems to be for men's emotional well-being. What the literature on identity verification and interaction does not consider is whether the identity of some individuals is compromised in the reinforcing of the identities of others. Stets and Burke (2005) argue that we have multiple identities and that there is usually a hierarchy relating to which identity is more important. Further research is needed to examine whether gender identities continue to operate in hierarchies.

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Povzetek

Pričujoči članek se ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako moški in ženske na kmetijah oblikujejo svoje spolne in delovne identitete skozi vzajemne interakcije in javne reprezentacije o njih samih. Prispevek dokazuje, da je identiteta proces, ki je tako kot spol, družbeno oblikovana skozi 'ustvarjanje' identitete. Kmetovanje v Evropi se je izredno spremenilo v zadnjih štirih desetletjih. Radikalno se je spremenil tudi položaj žensk na trgu dela in na družinski kmetiji. V zahodni Evropi so ženske nasploh in na družinskih kmetijah bolj dejavne na trgu dela kot pa pred štirimi desetletji. Čeprav njihovo celotno delo na kmetiji še vedno ni primerno prepoznano, imajo ženske tudi vidno, plačano zaposlitev. Raziskovalci so presenečeni, da se s tako spremenjeno prisotnostjo žensk na trgu dela, njihova identiteta na kmetijah ni bistveno spremenila. Prispevek zatrjuje, da slednje lahko razumemo le, če pojasnimo, kako moški in ženske na družinskih kmetijah preverjajo in krepijo kmečke delovne in spolne identitete. Če se delo zunaj kmetije ne 'kaže' kot spolno neprimerno delo, je to zato, ker prevprašuje vlogo moškega hranilca. S tako analizo lažje razumemo, zakaj ostaja diskurz družinske kmetije tako prevladujoč in vztrajen. V letih 2012 in 2013 je bila izpeljana kvalitativna študija na Severnem Irskem s ciljem, da bi se raziskalo, kakšne so posledice izvajanja EU programa razvoja podeželja za spol na kmetijah in na podeželju. Na podlagi nekaterih izsledkov te raziskave skušamo pojasniti, zakaj in kako se delovne in spolne identitete oblikujejo v kmečkih družinah.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kmetovanje, spolna identiteta, delovna identiteta, blaginja, sprememba

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